

Sharing Wisdom
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Survivor Testimony: Henry Nusbaum

At the beginning of my Holocaust studies, I was afraid I would never understand why memories were so important to the survivors. After all, I'm a little kid who doesn't understand very much. I thought everyone knew that even if it seems like we have nothing, if all of our possessions were lost, and we were without friends or family, we would still have our memories.

Then, I watched Henry Nusbaum's testimony and I started to understand. When he explained eating horse meat day after day, Henry's tone was matter of fact. Henry was not sharing the memory to shock people. He was simply telling his tale of survival. That's when I began to feel connected to Henry.

I know when life gets bad enough, people have to do difficult things just to survive because a couple of years after my parents were divorced, my mom had no job and no money to pay the rent. Sadly, my father was an alcoholic and lost his job. He couldn't send my mom money. Even though my sister had a job that paid well, she and my brother moved out. My mom and I were forced to live in our compact car.

Like Henry, I can talk about memories of things my mom and I did to survive. I can remember what we ate and how we stayed warm. Those memories aren't sad or happy. They just are. Still, like Henry, there are other memories from that time that affect me more.

Although Henry spoke of his personal suffering without emotion, his voice broke as he told the story of children walking into the Warsaw ghetto with their parents. The fact that, "children asked their papas, 'where are we going?' and the parents could not answer" was something that bothered Henry during the war and during his taped testimony.

For a long time, I wondered why their suffering impacted Henry more than his own did. Then, I figured it out. I realized Henry related to those children. Henry might not have asked his mom and dad why things were happening, but he must have asked God. The kids losing their innocence and belief that their parents could control things was like Henry losing his innocence and probably made him question God's control over things.

Everyone asks God why bad things happen. I couldn't ask my mom and dad why they couldn't just say sorry and stay married. I couldn't understand that my sister and brother moved out because we all wouldn't fit in the small car. All I could do was live and hope things would work out for me.

Because of this assignment, I learned that memories are not just tales remembered every once in a while. Memories are a part of the thing inside us that moves us forward and makes us succeed.

Like all of us, the survivors of the Holocaust want their memories honored. They share their memories with the hope that they are also sharing their wisdom.